ALIPH goes Digital!

The ALIPH Foundation is pleased to send you our very first newsletter. In this regular publication, you will be able to stay abreast of the projects we are supporting and keep in touch with the ALIPH Family.
Cultural heritage protection in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic
By Valéry Freland, Executive Director

Over the past few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has been sweeping the planet. For each of us, this major health crisis is a collective and personal ordeal. It is transforming our lifestyles and work, shaking our certainties about the world, and affecting us and our loved ones to our core.

Given this context, why and how should we continue our work to protect cultural heritage in conflict or post-conflict areas?

First, because cultural heritage, like artistic creation more generally, can help alleviate our current anxieties and provide us with a refuge from fear and suffering. It can strengthen our confidence in the future by making us rediscover our past, offering us new ways to read the present while connecting us to each other. Indeed, it is perhaps in such times that artistic creations are most essential, making us more aware of ourselves, our humanity, and our shared destiny.

This is why, although we are isolating ourselves and work in the field has stopped temporarily, it is important to make cultural heritage accessible to all, including to those living in areas marked by war and conflict. ALIPH has thus been committed since its creation to support the digitization of manuscripts and written, photographic or audiovisual archives, as well as the 3D rendering of models of heritage sites and ancient architecture.
One project that ALIPH is funding is from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), implemented in collaboration with several Iraqi cultural institutions, to restore, digitize and publish online exceptional Iraqi manuscripts. The results of this work will be made available to the Iraqi authorities and offered to the public via the trilingual (English, French and Arabic) Bibliothèques d'Orient website, which already contains nearly 10,000 documents.

The digitization of the highly symbolic site of Palmyra, damaged by Daesh, is also a priority for ALIPH. With our support, the association Paul Collart au Proche-Orient and the University of Lausanne are digitizing the collection of photographs by the Swiss archaeologist Paul Collart (1902-1981) of the Temple of Baalshamin so that it might be reconstructed virtually. At the same time, Aarhus University is working on a project to make the 4,000 photographs of funerary portraits by the Danish archaeologist Harald Ingholt (1896-1985) accessible to all.

This pandemic has brought to the fore the importance of digitization, not only as a means of preserving memory when faced with conflict, but also when faced with global uncertainty. ALIPH requires all the digitization projects it supports to be made open access, to not only contribute to the democratization of knowledge and the enrichment of research but also to foster new communities.

This unprecedented time must also lead us to work differently and to make the most of digital tools: while many of us remain far from the places we are protecting and reconstructing, we must seize the opportunity to deepen our engagement with international or local operators and pursue online training for their teams.

Second, this exceptional context also reminds us of the preponderant role that disease and epidemics have played in works of art. Boccaccio's "The Decameron", Pieter Bruegel the Elder's "The Triumph of Death", Edvard Munch's "Self-Portrait" painted after the Spanish flu, Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal" and Camus' "The Plague" elevated humanity's fight against these invisible contagions to the status of art, and often served as harbingers of profound economic, political, social and cultural reforms.

Only time will tell us what great artistic achievements or anthropological upheavals will come out of this scourge.

In the meantime, this health crisis has highlighted two imperatives to which the protection of heritage in conflict zones can contribute: solidarity and sustainable development. It is important to preserve cultural heritage as a form of memory and an expression of global diversity. This is done first and foremost for the benefit of those who hold it, particularly those populations in countries in conflict. It is for them and with them that these heritage protection projects must be carried out. It is also with them that online access to heritage must be guaranteed, with the knowledge that the digital divide makes this work an even greater challenge. And it is for them that, when the time comes, the work on the ground will resume. Moving forward, our collective effort to protect and rehabilitate heritage, whether it be material or immaterial, must broaden its scope to include a deeper understanding of and reaction to climate change and its adverse consequences on sustainable development and peace.
In Solidarity against the coronavirus pandemic

The ALIPH Secretariat, December 2019 (c) ALIPH

The COVID-19 pandemic has added complexity to the implementation of ALIPH-supported projects in areas already characterized by tensions, instability, and economic and social crises. In this context, ALIPH joined other foundations by signing the European Foundation Centre’s Statement on COVID-19 to stand together in the spirit of solidarity.

Indeed, the security on the ground of our partners’ teams is a priority for ALIPH, whether they face the risk of conflict or a health crisis. Thus, ALIPH is extending its support to its operators and working with them to minimize the impact that this crisis could have on the viability of their projects.

Although the work on the ground is temporarily interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, there are still concrete actions that the Secretariat and ALIPH’s partners are able to carry out. This period can be conducive for programming future work and for online learning. Moreover, for the ALIPH Secretariat, following this 18-month period of rapid expansion, this forced isolation affords the opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved, to plan for the future, while continuing to work hand in hand with implementing partners operators.

Please note that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff of the ALIPH Secretariat is working from home until further notice. You may contact our staff via the SmartSimple submission platform, the central phone number +41 22 795 18 00 or by writing to contact@aliph-foundation.org.

Thank you for your understanding.

Stay healthy and stay safe.
Under its third call for projects, which closed on 16 March, ALIPH received over 100 projects. These are currently being examined and the final selection will be announced as soon as possible.

Since summer 2018, nearly 50 projects have been supported by ALIPH, more than 17 million USD committed, and 80 million USD gathered from public and private donors. The ALIPH Foundation's mission to protect cultural heritage in countries in conflict and post crisis areas is now well underway and its first results are becoming tangible.

The submissions for the 3rd call for projects were sent in from organizations from 30 countries, requesting to carry out projects in 33 countries. Now, the projects are being evaluated by the ALIPH Secretariat, independent Scientific Review Panels and the ALIPH Scientific Committee, chaired by Jean-Luc Martinez, President-Director of the Louvre Museum. The Foundation Board will then make the final granting decision.

More about our projects
The former caravan city of Hatra (northern Iraq, 100 km south of Mosul), a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was reached for the first time last February since its liberation from ISIS in April 2017 by an Italian-Iraqi scientific team.

The team succeeded in thoroughly documenting and mapping the site (over 700 hectares) using drone imagery. The most spectacular discovery was fragments from large sculpted heads, partially damaged by ISIS, that had decorated the facade of the sanctuary dedicated to the God of the Sun.

This emergency project funded by ALIPH was undertaken by archaeologists representing the International Association for Mediterranean and Eastern Studies (ISMEO) in partnership with the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage.
In 2011, following looting stemming from political unrest, the Musée des Civilisations de Côte d’Ivoire (Abidjan) lost part of its valuable collection. Last year, Fondation Tapa applied to ALIPH for an emergency grant to reinforce the security measures of the museum building and the storage rooms, and to develop an emergency plan to minimize future risks to the collection. The infrastructure interventions have now been completed.

Top picture: installing a secured door
Bottom left picture: new shelves for the collection
Bottom right picture: secured door

(c) Fondation Tapa